

First Corinthians for New Churches

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LESSON 1 - WHAT UNITES US: CHRIST

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. The Exhortation (1:10).

A congregation needs harmony as it focuses on its unitary purpose.
Internal strife detracts from this unity of purpose.

2. The Problem (1:11-12).

Multiple planters and tillers offer an opportunity for jealousy and division.
We boast about or exalt the qualities of one over another.
We attach ourselves to "leading lights" because of the qualities we see in them.

3. The Solution (1:13-17).

Christ is the solution:

Christ has been crucified for us (the gospel proclaimed)

We have been baptized in the name of Christ (the gospel obeyed)

This unites us, and nothing should divide those whom Christ has united.

Questions for Discussion in Groups (Leaders of Groups):

1. What tensions threaten the unity of the Corinthian church? What sort of credentials or reasons would some Corinthians have offered for following Paul, Peter or Apollos? Who was Apollos, for example (cf. Acts 18:24-19:1). What might each group have found to boast about "their" leader?
2. Is the one who says "I follow only Christ" (with an implied... "and you don't") just as sectarian as the one who says "I follow Apollos"? Or is that implication fair?
3. What kind of harmony and oneness does Paul expect in order for the Corinthians to obey his command here? Does Paul expect conformity and agreement in all particulars (e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:7-13)? How does the second paragraph point us to the kind of unity Paul expects?
4. How does Paul undercut these divisions? What two questions does Paul ask to redirect us to true unity? How are these two questions foundational for Christian unity?
5. Do we understand what these two important truths mean? What does it mean that Christ died for us, and that we were baptized in his name?
6. Does it sound strange that Paul was happy he had not baptized many in Corinth? Why is Paul glad he did not baptize many?
7. Does Paul mean that preaching the gospel is more important than baptism? Does he mean to say that baptism is unimportant?
8. Why does Paul fear will detract from the power of the gospel? Why does he express this fear here in connection with these divisions in Corinth?

9. How may we at the Cordova church apply Paul's exhortation to unity? How can we maintain the unity of this congregation? Upon what must we focus? How do we keep that focus? How does this focus prevent attitudes such as "I follow Apollos"?

LESSON 2 - WHAT MIGHT DIVIDE US: BOASTING AND JEALOUSY

1 Corinthians 3:1-4:5

1. The Problem: Worldliness

These immature Corinthian Christians are behaving like the world.
Various attitudes are present:

Jealousy (3:3)

Strife (arguing with each other) over leaders (3:3-4)

Bragging (boasting) about their leader's work (3:21)

Judging whose work is most important (4:2-3)

Their problem is that they primarily use worldly wisdom (3:18-20).

2. Two Analogies

Agricultural Analogy: A Garden (3:4-9).

Paul planted.

Apollos watered.

God made it grow.

Paul and Apollos are merely worker's in God's garden.

Application: We are fellow-servants in God's field.

Building Analogy: Temple (3:10-17).

Paul laid the foundation for the Corinthian church (temple): Jesus Christ.

As long as the foundation remains, the church is secure and expects salvation.

Ministry, however, is a mixed bag:

Some build with straw, hay, and wood.

Others build with gold, silver and precious stones.

Ministers who build on the foundation will be saved even when their building materials are burned up with the fire of judgment.

Application: Do not destroy God's temple, the church!

3. Paul's Application:

Principles to remember:

Everything belongs to Christians because we belong to Christ (3:22-23).

Our first duty is faithfulness (not success; 4:2).

God is the judge, no one else (4:4).

Consequently,

Stop bragging and boasting about ministers (Paul, Apollos, Peter; 3:21)

Don't judge anyone's ministry or motive; God will reveal it (4:5).

God will praise each of his faithful ministers (3:8, 14; 4:5).

Discussion Questions (Group Leader)

1. Since each group in Corinth thought of themselves as "spiritual" and "mature," how might they have reacted to Paul's comment in 3:1-4? What is the evidence of their immaturity?
2. How are "worldly" versus "spiritual" people defined here? What attitudes and dispositions does Paul point as evidence of worldliness in this section? How were the Corinthians behaving toward each other?
3. What is the point of the agricultural metaphor in the context of the problem in Corinth? What application does Paul make?
4. What is the point of the building metaphor in the context of the problem in Corinth? What application does Paul make?
5. What are the building materials in verses 10-15? Some believe that "hay, etc." refers to converts who will not persevere in faith whereas "gold" refers to converts who do persevere, while others believe that the "hay" and "gold" refer to how one builds (methodology, attitudes, motives). In either case, the foundation is the key and the ground of salvation. When we build on the foundation of Christ, we will be saved even when our converts do not persevere or when we make mistakes in how we build. While the work of the builder may not survive or it may have been badly constructed, as long as the foundation remains, the builder (worker) will be saved. This signifies the importance of the proper foundation--Jesus Christ.
6. How do these building and agricultural analogies apply to the new church planting here at Cordova? How do we view each other? Who is growing this church? On what foundation are we building? How well are we building? Are we building with straw or gold?
7. Why does Paul raise the question of "worldly wisdom" in verses 18-20? What does this have to do with the two previous analogies? How does "worldly wisdom" invade planting and building a church?
8. How does the idea that "everything belongs" to Christians answer the problem of jealousy and boasting? What does this principle tell us that enables us to rise above such worldly attitudes? How does an understanding of this principle demonstrate the worldliness of fighting over leaders?
9. Whose role is it to judge? Why does Paul say he does not even judge himself, much less care about how others judge him?
10. What does this mean for our own ministries? If we are not to judge, does this mean that we should not evaluate how we conduct our ministries? What kind of judgment is Paul talking about here in the context of comparing leaders?
11. What is the difference between respecting a Christian leader and the problem Paul deals with here?
12. What steps can we take as a new church community to hedge against falling into this kind of communal jealousy and strife?

LESSON 3 - COMMUNITY STANDARDS: WHEN WE MUST JUDGE

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1. The Problem: Immorality (5:1-2).

The church is, once again, acting like the world, even worse than the world!
The community retains within its midst someone who even shames the Gentile world.
A man is sleeping with his father's wife!
Pride prevents the church from excluding this man from its community (5:2, 6).

2. The Principle: Discipline (5:3-8).

The community has standards.
It must be without yeast.
It must be pure and truthful.
The community must discipline immoral people.
Hand them over to Satan when God's people are assembled.
Get rid of the yeast for the sake of the purity of the Lamb.
The community must judge evil in its midst.
It must not celebrate the feast with immoral people.
It must not eat with immoral people.

3. The Distinction: Community and the World (5:9-13).

We do not judge the world.
We must engage the world rather than isolate ourselves from it.
But we do judge the community.
We exclude people who engage in certain activities without repentance.
The judge is a holy community that lives in the world for the sake of the world.

Discussion Questions (Group Leaders):

1. Why do you think the church was so willing to accept or tolerate this immoral brother? How does pride factor into their willingness? What differences exist between how Paul sees this situation and how the Corinthians see it?
2. When is a church expected to be patient and gentle with one of its members, but stern with others? What makes the difference?
3. How would paraphrase what Paul tells them to do in verses 3-4?
4. Given the yeast imagery, what is Paul's concern if this situation is permitted to continue? How is this consistent with the "new bread" they have become (vv. 7-8)?
5. What was the double purpose Paul had in mind when he required the expulsion of this immoral brother?
6. What practical meaning does discipline have in relation to the community and its relationship with the disciplined brother? What relationship is severed in discipline? What relationships may continue?

7. Why is there a difference between the way Christians relate to those outside the faith and the way they relate to believers?
8. For what reasons should a disciple be excluded from the community according to this text? How are these related to each other?
9. How do you reconcile Paul's teaching here with that in 1 Corinthians 4:3-5. What is the point in each? How do we reconcile this with Jesus' teaching that we should not judge each other (Matthew 7:1-2)? When is it appropriate to "judge" and inappropriate to "judge"?
10. Why is it important for the community have ethical standards? What does this say about the nature of the church and its relationship to the world?

LESSON 4 - Community Ethics: A Call to Holiness

1 Corinthians 6:9-20

1. Once Dirty, Now Cleansed (6:9-11).

Don't be deceived: the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10).
But you have been washed (6:11)!

2. Christian Freedom and Sexual Immorality (6:12-17).

Some Corinthians believed "everything is permissible" regarding the body.
Paul rejects this permissiveness in the use of the body.
Your body is intended for the Lord.
Your body is united to Christ.

3. Exhortation: Flee Sexual Immorality (6:18-20).

Sexual sin is a sin against the body.
Sexual sin is a sin against God's presence in our body.
Principle: Honor God with your body.

Discussion Questions (for group leaders)

1. How does the list of 5:11 compare with 6:9-10? Any differences, additions? What does this tell you about the sort of problems that were part of the Corinthian culture? What does this say about moral expectations within the kingdom of God and the Corinthian church?
2. What is the meaning of "washed, sanctified and justified"? How does this offer hope to the Corinthian culture and church? How does it offer hope to us? How does this statement reflect the grace of God and the changed lives of people?
3. Paul's first argument against immorality is the resurrection body. How does the resurrection signify the importance of the body? What implications does this have how we use our bodies?
4. Think about the principle "the body for the Lord and the Lord for the body" (6:13). What does that mean?
5. Paul's second argument against immorality is that our bodies are joined to Christ's body. What is the ethical argument here? How is this principle applied to prostitution? How might we apply this principle to other concerns and issues in our setting?
6. Paul's third argument against immorality is that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. What is the ethical argument here? How is this principle applied to immorality? How might we apply this principle to other concerns and issues in our setting?
7. Who owns a Christian's body? Why does God own it? How does this apply to an American attitude that says: "It's my body; I can do what I want with it as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else!"?
8. How does sexual immorality "sin against the body" (6:18) whereas other sins are committed "outside the body"? What is it about sexuality that enables Paul to make this distinction?

9. What are the possible applications of "honor God with your body"? How might we apply this basic principle to other questions in our culture?

Lesson 5 - Healthy Marriages: Commitment to Each Other

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

1. Paul's opinion was that singleness--for those who had the gift (7:7)--was preferable to marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God. He says this in 7:32-35. Married people must devote attention to their spouses, but single people can devote themselves to the kingdom of God and its work. For this reason, Paul may have written "It is good for a man not to marry" (or literally, "touch a woman"), though some think he is quoting his opponents in Corinth (see NIV footnote). I think it is best to take this as Paul's own principle. He would prefer people not marry for the sake of the kingdom, but he recognizes that not everyone has that gift (7:7).
2. Paul is not against marriage. Because of the prevalence of immorality, each person should have his own spouse. Sexuality is not evil, but marriage is the proper arena for sexual expression.
3. Paul believes that sexuality between husband and wife is important. It is an expression of mutual submission--the husband has authority over the wife's body and the wife has authority over the husband's body. Here is the only place where the word "authority" is used in relationship to the gender roles in marriage and it is a mutual authority. Husbands and wives are to have mutual respect in the sexual relationship and to fully give themselves to each other.
4. The only exception to this sexual relationship--which means Paul expects and encourages sexuality between marriage partners--is by mutual consent for a spiritual purpose (prayer). But the couple must return to a sexual relationship otherwise Satan will tempt them.
5. Paul prefers the unmarried and widows to remain unmarried, but if they need to marry because of the "burning" lusts, then it is better to marry than to burn.
6. Paul hates divorce, just as God does (Mal. 2:14-16). A Christian who divorces his spouse must remain unmarried or be reconciled. They should not marry another. Paul is thinking about divorce here and not a mere "separation" because he tells the Christian to remain "unmarried." Paul does not offer the option of remarriage to another in this situation.
7. Paul hates divorce so much that he demands that a Christian remain married to a non-Christian if the non-Christian wants to remain married. This situation may have arisen in the context of conversions, but it is no sin to be married to a non-Christian. The marriage covenant must be kept even if it is made with a non-Christian. Christians must be faithful to their vows because God is faithful to his. The hope is that the believing spouse will save the unbelieving one (7:16). Further, the children of this marriage are not defiled. Rather, the marriage is a real (sanctified) marriage, so the children are legitimate (holy) children. The marriage is not an unholy alliance, but an opportunity for the redemption of the unbelieving spouse and raising children up for the glory of God.
8. Although Paul hates divorce, he permits divorce for those whose non-Christian spouses initiate and carry out a divorce. The "leaving" of 1 Cor. 7:15 is a divorce. If the unbeliever wants a divorce, let him have it. God has called us to peace, so do not resist the unbeliever's divorce if he is determined to leave. The believer in this case is "not under bondage" or is "not bound" (7:15). This is a debated phrase (you may find disagreement here--and even disagree with me), but I think it should be paralleled with 7:11 where the believer is bound to remain unmarried or be reconciled. In 7:15 the believer is not bound, that is, there is no duty for reconciliation and there is a freedom to remarry.

9. Paul articulates a principle of peace in v. 16 and, I think, explains this in verses 17, 20, 24. In applying this principle, Paul believes that people should remain in the state in which they were called. If married, stay married. If single, stay single. But the single may marry if they desire and they would not sin in so doing. The only exception to this is apparently two Christians who are married and divorce each other. They should remain unmarried or be reconciled. However, remember that Jesus gave an exception even to that in Matthew 19:9. Where adultery is involved, a Christian may divorce their spouse and remarry without sin.
10. All of you realize that many factions have appeared in the church due to divorce and remarriage issues. It is best to stick with the text here without trying to solve every situation. Try to apply Paul's principles here, but be sure to use the principle Paul is applying by understand the specific context in which he is writing. We do not want to solve or resolve all questions in this class today. Rather, we want to underscore the importance of mutual submission in marriage, the goodness of sexuality and marriage, the commitment and faithfulness to which we are called in marriage and that God hates divorce even though he has some exceptions where divorce is permitted even for Christians.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Why does Paul believe it is better not to marry? What is his motive for singleness? Does he intend this for everyone? Why not?
2. What is the principle that underlies Paul's discussion of sexuality within marriage (e.g., mutual submission, authority)? What does this say about the "goodness" of sexuality?
3. What is the role of "mutual submission" in a marriage? How might this principle be applied to other things in a marriage? Does this entail an egalitarian notion of marriage? How does this square with Paul's other texts where the wife should submit to the husband as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:22ff)? How can 1 Cor. 7:4 and Eph. 5:23ff both be true?
4. Why is Paul so opposed to divorce? What does divorce symbolize?
5. What is the principle Paul offers two divorced Christians? What are their responsibilities? Are there any exceptions to this principle (cf. Matthew 19:9).
6. What is the principle Paul offers a Christian who is married to a non-Christian? Why should the Christian stay in the marriage? Why is not this marriage a defiled one? Why are not the children of that marriage defiled?
7. If the unbeliever divorces the believer, what is the believer's responsibility? What do you think "not under bondage" means in 1 Corinthians 7:15?
8. What does the principle "God has called us to live in peace" mean? How does it apply to this divorce situation? How might it apply more generally? How does this fit Paul's other "rules" in this chapter (verses 17, 20, 24)? Are these versions of the same thing?

Lesson 6 - When Love is More Important than Knowledge

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1. Love and Knowledge (8:1-3).

Knowledge generates conceit.
Love generates body-building.
God knows the one who loves him.

2. What We Know and Don't Know About Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:4-6).

What We Know:

We know there is only one God and the idols are imposters.
We know that God the Father created the world through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some Don't Know:

Some still believe that idols are gods.
Some still believe that food sacrificed to idols is holy for those gods.

3. Where Love is More Important than Knowledge (8:9-13).

Love does not always exercise the freedom that knowledge brings.
When knowledge causes stumbling, love has priority.
When knowledge has priority over a weak brother, we sin.
Application: never exalt your knowledge over loving your spiritual family.

Questions for Discussion:

1. When you are in an argument, how do you react: (1) dig in your heels until you are satisfied that you have won and said all that can be said?, or (2) seek out a compromise while tenaciously holding on to your preferences, or (3) give in to the other rather than increase the animosity?
2. What is the argument about in this text? What is the meaning of eating food sacrificed to idols?
3. What knowledge do some claim to possess? What do they know? Does Paul agree with them?
4. What is the basic Christian confession in this text? What does this confession say about God and Jesus?
5. What is it that the weak do not know? How does eating food sacrificed to idols affect the weak? In what sense does it cause them to stumble?
6. What does "stumbling" mean? What would "stumbling" look like in our church context? Is it "stumbling" if someone gets mad and leaves one congregation to go to another?
7. Paul is applying the general principle that knowledge puffs up, but that love builds up. What does it mean to say that "love is more important than knowledge"? Is that true? Is there a sense in which it is not true?

8. How does this principle look in our church context? Does this mean that we "give in" to each other's particular interpretations of various "doctrines"? Does this mean that we do not "offend" (cause discomfort) anyone? Does this mean that churches should seek to "please" everyone and everyone agree on anything that is done? Is this what Paul is talking about?
9. How do we distinguish between things that are simply matters of discomfort and things which destroy the other person's faith? How does Paul distinguish it here? [Paul talks about the confession of one God and the Lord Jesus Christ--this is the arena of his discussion; not about preferences in clothing style, etc.]
10. Is there anything in our lives where our freedom destroys the faith of another? Can you envision situations where this happens? [I am thinking about a friend who was so caught up in the rock/drug culture that after conversion rock music was anathema to him because he associated it with the drug/violence/anti-Christian culture. Rock music took him back into that world and attacked his faith. Consequently, in his presence I decided I would not listen to rock music. That music had the effect of destroying his faith.]

Lesson 7 - When Others are More Important than My Rights

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

1. Context (9:1-18)

Paul has a “right” to expect remuneration from the Corinthians on account of his ministry.
Paul has the freedom to exercise this right.
Paul defends the right (9:7-12a).
But Paul will not exercise this right if it will hinder the gospel in any way (9:12b-17).

2. The Principle of Self-Denial (9:19-23).

Paul denies himself for the sake of evangelism (9:19).
What does this principle look like?
Among Jews, become like a Jew.
Among those under the law, become like one under the law.
Among those not under the law, become like one not under the law.
Among the weak, become like one of the weak.
The principle: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”

3. Paul Pursues this Ministry of Evangelism (9:24-27).

Paul uses the analogy of an athletic competition regarding his ministry.
Paul trains for this task.
Paul runs for a goal.
Paul seeks to share in the blessings of the gospel even as he shares it with others.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does this principle mean for Paul? What does it mean to be like a Jew, or to be like a weak person, or to be like those who are not under the law? What would that look like? Can we imagine how that life would look like at different times?
2. In this text, whose rights are more important than ours? What is the ultimate goal? Whose interests should we exalt over our "rights"?
3. How has the Cordova Community Church applied this principle? What concerns should we have as we apply this principle? Are we willing to expand our "comfort zones" for the sake of others and how it might reach others our culture?
4. How does this apply within the Christian community itself? How does Paul's statement in 8:13 reflect this principle for inter-Community disputes? What is different about the way we treat our brothers in community and the way we "become like" those we are trying to evangelize?
5. What is the race that Paul is running here? What is the prize? What is the training he must do? Draw out the athletic analogy here. How do athletes prepare for an event and how do they pursue it with the prize in mind?

6. Why does Paul use this "race imagery" in this context? How does this signal the importance of the present topic? How does this apply to the topic of evangelism or preaching the gospel? What is Paul's point in comparing the Christian life to a race?
7. Does Paul teach asceticism here ("beat my body"--deny your body pleasures and beat it into submission by self-inflicted wounds)? What is the principle of making your own body a "slave" to yourself? Who controls you: your mind or your body? How does Paul's promotion of self-denial here differ from asceticism?

Lesson 8 - No Presumption: Lord's Supper and Ethics

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

1. A Warning from the History of Israel (10:1-13).

God Redeemed Us, both Israel and the Church.

Israel was baptized into Moses, just as we are baptized into Christ.

Israel eat and drank spiritually, just as we eat and drink spiritually in Christ.

Nevertheless, God punished Israel.

Idolatry

Sexual Immorality

Testing the Lord

Grumbling Against the Lord

The Warning is for Us.

Similar punishment awaits us for similar sins.

But God is faithful.

2. The Meaning of the Supper (10:14-22).

The Supper is Communion.

It is communion with the Lord.

It is communion with each other.

Ethical Commitment

We cannot participate in the meals of idols.

We cannot have a dual commitment.

God is jealous.

Group Discussion:

1. To what does "same spiritual food and drink" point in 10:1-4? Why is this important to say? What is the analogy Paul is drawing here? What is the "spiritual rock"?
2. Why do you think it is important for Paul to draw on the analogy of "baptism and the Lord's Supper"? Do you think some people feel like that because they have been baptized and participate in the Supper regularly that they are somehow in God's good graces? Why do they think this way?
3. What are the sins that disqualified Israel from God's grace even though they had shared in the "spiritual rock"?
4. What is the moral or example of this teaching? How does Paul apply this to the Corinthians in 10:11-12?
5. How does 10:13 encourage us? What practical encouragement do you draw from this text? What does it mean for you when you are struggling against sin?
6. What does it mean to "participate" in the body and blood of Christ? How is the Lord's Supper a communion? With whom do we commune? [Both with Christ and with each other.]
7. If communion is both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with each other), which does our practice of the Supper emphasize? How can we do things differently to emphasize one or the other at different times? What practical suggestions would you make?

8. Why does the Lord's Supper stand so strongly in contrast with idolatry for Paul? What is it about the Supper that means we cannot sit at two different tables? What does this say about the importance and significance of the Supper for the church?
9. What does idolatry represent in our culture? What is idolatry in our culture? What are some idols that are worshipped in our culture?
10. Can you imagine a scenario where we would violate this text even though we do not eat sacrificial meat at the local temple? [For example, can one eat at the Lord's table on Sunday and then visit the "Gentleman's Club" on Monday?] Having identified contemporary idols, what does participating in the Lord's Supper this morning imply about our attitudes toward those contemporary idols?

LESSON 9 - MALE AND FEMALE IN THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3-10

Interpretative Options:

- a. Describes a specific situation where only women are present, but this does not explain why women must be "veiled" if no men are present.
- b. Describes a private situation other than the public worship assembly, but this is inconsistent with the immediate context where the Lord's Supper is also present in this assembly (11:17ff) and that it addresses an assembly practice (11:16).
- c. Describes the participation of inspired women in a public assembly without permitting uninspired women to participate because it would violate male "headship," but this implies that God inspired women to violate his created order of "headship."
- d. Describes the participation of women in a worship assembly where they "lead" the assembly in prayer and prophesy as long as they reflect creation values through appropriate cultural symbols.

Observations:

- a. Affirms male "headship" in the context of worship assemblies of the church (11:3)
- b. Praying and prophesying are audible acts in the assembly in which women not only participate but also "lead" (e.g., at least prophecy is for the edification of others).
- c. Gender distinction is maintained by different uses of the "veil" (Roman toga pulled up over the head during the act of praying or prophesying) so "that leadership" in praying and prophesying does not violate male "headship."
- d. Gender distinction is rooted in God's act of creation (11:7-9).

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. We should maintain the creation principle of "headship" in our worship assemblies.
2. We should not confuse "leadership" with "headship."
3. We should permit the use of women in ways that do not violate "headship" in the assembly.
4. We must use women with cultural sensitivity so that the creation value of "headship" is reflected and symbolized in the way in which they are utilized.
5. We must take account of other texts which speak to this concern as well (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15).

Lesson 10 - Whose Meal is This? The Lord's Supper or Ours?

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

1. The problem Paul encounters in 1 Cor. 11:17-22 is division (v. 18, schisms) and factions (v. 19, heresies). They are not waiting for the whole church to assemble, but they are proceeding with the "supper" before everyone arrives (cf. vv. 21,33). They had gathered to eat the "Lord's supper" but they instead ate their own "supper" because they were hungry and thirsty (vv. 20-21,34). This reflected a socio-economic problem in the church since those who have homes would not wait on those who have nothing (v. 22). According to Paul, this violates the tradition which he received from the Lord and had handed on to the Corinthians (v. 23).
2. The problem is occasioned by the breakdown of unity in the context of a meal. Paul describes this supper with various terms: supper (11:20); communion (10:16); Lord's table (10:21); breaking bread (10:16). The church in Corinth ate a supper (11:20,21,25). This was the regular evening meal in the Greco-Roman world. The two major courses of the banquet were the "supper" proper which was followed by the sumposion (symposium)--a drinking party. In a religious context this would have included a chant to a god. These "suppers" paralleled the Greek practice of a "potluck" dinner. It could take place in homes or at sacrificial meals in Greek temples. It is fundamentally identification. Paul did not forbid the meal, but regulated it in the light of abuses. Paul wanted them to come together "to eat" (11:33; in 11:20-22,27-28 "eat" is also used). They ought to come together as an community or church (11:18) which unites as the body of Christ (11:29).
3. Greco-Roman meals were occasions of social stratification, drunkenness and disorderliness. They were also at the center of most social institutions or social occasions (e.g., funerary banquets, sacrificial banquets, philosophical society meetings, trade guild meetings, religious society meetings). Plutarch's Table Talk (ca. 100 C.E.) is an example of the extensive discussion of table etiquette in the ancient world. Rick Oster offers this summary of the problems generally associated with Greco-Roman meals (appeared in the journal *Leaven*):
 - a. In practice, ancient meals were very hierarchical in arrangement. The high degree of social and economic stratification (rich/poor; free/slaves) that prevailed in the Graeco-Roman world was imported into arrangements for dinner. Accordingly, the best seats, the best food, the best wine, the best company and the best entertainment were reserved for the affluent, the noble born, the free, and the prestigious. Several pagan philosophers and rhetoricians complain about this practice of bringing social stratification into the meal experience. These writers argue that mealtime and the meal experiences should be communal meals that are not destroyed by societal concerns for "rich and poor" or "free and slave."
 - b. Ancient mealtimes were often characterized by disruptive speech and argumentative cliques. We have testimony both in the literary and epigraphical record from antiquity that religious guilds and fraternal organizations had to adopt "Rules of Order" to keep a sense of orderliness, especially at their symposia or evening meals. [As one Latin inscription from Pompeii stated it, 'Be sociable and put aside, if you can, annoying quarrels. If you can't, go back to your own home.'--from Oster, 1 Corinthians (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 277.]
 - c. Drunkenness was a regular problem at these Graeco-Roman meals and banquets. Both the quantity and the quality of wine served was so important to ancient men and women that there was often an attendant in charge of this (cf. John 2:8-10). Graeco-Roman

- authors whose values included moderation in drinking criticized their peers who regularly became intoxicated at these meals.
4. The tradition that Paul cites is that the bread was broken in remembrance of Jesus before the supper and, after the supper (v. 25), the cup was drunk. The seriousness of the occasion is the connection this meal has with the Lord's death (v. 26); it was the night of his betrayal (v. 24). This is the tradition that Paul applies as a norm or standard for the practice of the Lord's supper in Corinth.
 - a. Here the norm is the "Lord's supper". It is his table, not ours. Therefore, we are to treat each other as fellow-servants, as fellow-members of the body. Just as the gospel is for all, so the Supper is for all who share faith in the gospel. The meal ought to proclaim the gospel, but their actions had undermined the gospel itself. It did not reflect the values of Christ.
 - b. Consequently, one must not eat or drink in an "unworthy manner," which refers to the divisive context in which it was being eaten at Corinth (v. 27). Christians must "discern the body" when eating. (The NIV adds "of the Lord" which is not in the Greek text.) Does this mean the body of Christ in the bread? I think not since it is likely Paul would have said "body and blood" as in v. 27 if this were his meaning. Rather, it concerns the problem at Corinth--the unity of the church (Christ's body). Paul had earlier made the same shift from "body" (=flesh of Christ) to "body" (=church) in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. I think he does the same thing here. But this is a difficult text. Because the body has experienced schism and factions, many within the church are weak and ill (v. 30). The body must examine itself about the manner in which the supper is conducted (v. 28).
 - c. Here form and function must reflect appropriate theological meaning. Form should serve the function of the supper. The Corinthian form undermined the theological meaning of the supper. The church, then, needs to give attention to the form as well as the elements, order and meaning of the supper.
 5. Paul believes they should continue to eat the supper, but wait for everyone so that no one will go hungry. In the context of this communal meal where food is shared, the communion of the body and blood of the Lord through the bread and wine will result in a communion with each other through the oneness of the body. Paul gives them three instructions.
 - a. Instruction 1: wait till everyone arrives before you eat the supper.
 - b. Instruction 2: if you are hungry, eat something at home before you assemble so you can wait for everyone to arrive.
 - c. Instruction 3: Paul will settle everything else when he arrives.

Questions for Discussion

1. Had you been there, what would you have seen, heard and felt as the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper? [Some were drunk, and others were hungry. Social distinctions of rich and poor; different groups eating together divided from others. Social stratification at meals; perhaps even appointed seats.]
2. How was the Lord's Supper being distorted? What purpose of the Supper was being undermined by the way in which the Corinthians observed the Supper?
3. How does Paul's recitation of the institution of the Supper (which reads like Luke 22:19-20) answer the problem?
4. What does Paul mean by eating and drinking in an "unworthy manner"?

5. What sort of "self-examination" (v. 28) is appropriate for the Lord's Supper? How does this relate to "judging" ourselves (v. 31)?
6. How would you explain the meaning of the Lord's Supper to a non-Christian?
7. Does Paul forbid eating a supper together in the context of the Lord's Supper? Where and when does he say we need to eat? [Watch the language here closely. Paul does not say we should not eat together, even as the Supper of the Lord; but that we should wait for each other. He wants us to continue to eat together, but we should simply wait for everyone to get there. Waiting here is a sign of unity and community rather than reflecting the factions within the body. If people cannot wait, then they should eat something before they come so they will be able to wait for everyone to arrive for the communal meal.]
8. How can form (the way in which we observe the Supper as a corporate body) affect the function and meaning of the Supper? What does our present "form" say about the Supper?
9. How might we change the "form" of our present observance to enhance the biblical meaning of the Supper?
10. What are some ways in which we do not "discern the body" in our participation in the Lord's Supper?

Lesson 11 - Body Language: Whose Job is This Anyway? **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

1. The Unity of the Body (12:12-14).

God created the unity of the body.

We are all baptized.

We are all given the Spirit.

This unity overcomes all human distinctions: ethnicity, economics, gender.

Even the diverse gifts are intended to unite:

Common source – God

Common faith – Christ

Common power - Spirit

2. The Diversity of the Body (12:15-20).

The Problem in Corinth

Exalted one gift over another

Pride and jealousy dominated.

Diversity is God's design.

God arranged the parts.

Thus, jealousy and envy are worldly.

3. The Interdependency of the Body (12:21-26).

Interdependence means shared experience.

Suffer with each other.

Rejoice with each other.

Interdependence means equal concern for each other.

Interdependence means the weaker members receive special honor.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways does Paul stress the unity of the believers in verses 12-13? [baptism, indwelling of the Spirit, breaks down all ethnic/social/economic barriers]
2. Given this emphasis on unity in the context of spiritual gifts, why do you think is the problem in Corinth? What evidence is there in the text for these problems? [spiritual pride over gifts]
3. How do these same problems evidence themselves in the present church? How might they arise in the Cordova church?
4. How does Paul picture the diversity of the body? What do you think is the most significant point in this picture?
5. What is God's role in creating and maintaining this diversity?
6. How are the parts of the body interdependent upon each other? How is this illustrated in the text?

7. What is God's goal for his body according to vv. 21-26? How might have divisions manifested themselves in the Corinthian church? How might divisions manifest themselves in the Cordova church?
8. In the light of this text, how do we show honor to the "weaker" parts while showing no special honor to the "presentable parts"? What does this mean for the Cordova church? Does it create a problem for weaker members to receive "special honor" in the body? Isn't that the reverse of our culture?
9. How can Cordova reflect God's goal for the body? What practical steps can we take to promote this goal in the Cordova church?
10. What one thing can you do this week to actualize the intention of this text?

Lesson 12 - Love Language: Love Heals Disunity **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

1. Without Love, It Doesn't Count (13:1-3).

The Problem in Corinth

The description of what love is in 13:4-7 means that the opposite was present in Corinth.

The problem focused on the jealousies surrounding the various gifts.

Love is the motive of everything good.

Tongues without love?

Prophecy without love?

Faith without love?

Generosity without love?

Martyrdom without love?

2. Love is.... (13:4-7).

Love is patient and kind.

Love is not

Boastful

Proud

Rude

Self-seeking

Easily Angered

No Record of Wrong

Love does

Not delight in evil

Rejoice in truth.

Protect

Trusts

Hopes

Perseveres

3. Love Lasts (13:8-13).

The gifts will not last.

Tongues

Prophecy

Knowledge

A time is coming when only love will matter; only love lasts.

Questions (Discussion Leaders):

1. What are the five ministries (gifts) that Paul mentions in verses 1-3? His point is the same with each. What is the significance of that point for the Corinthians? What does it say to us?

2. Given the description of love in verses 4-7 and remembering the context of "spiritual gifts," what do you think is going on in the Corinthian church? Imagine yourself as part of that church community. What is being said? What are some Christians doing? What does Paul's description of love tell about some of the attitudes within the Corinthian church?
3. What do each of these descriptions mean? What does it say about a "big picture" of a loving person? Do you know anyone who embodies this "big picture" so that you can say they are models for you? Describe this person for the group.
4. Take each of those descriptions, or a cluster of them, and offer a specific example of how that looks in a Christian community. Unlike the Corinthians, what do Christians do/say in order to demonstrate kindness, patience, humility, etc.
5. Why is love the greatest? How can he say love is greater than tongues, prophecy and knowledge? How can Paul say love is greater than faith and hope? What does he mean?
6. How should we reflect this chapter in our community? What are some practical things we need to do and emphasize to maintain a loving community?

Lesson 13 - Worship: Rational, Emotional or Both? **1 Corinthians 14:1-25**

1. Prophecy Better than Tongues (14:1-5).

The uninterpreted tongue-speech confuses the church.
Prophecy edifies the church.

2. Unintelligible Tongues Unproductive (14:6-12).

There is no profit if there is no understanding.
Uninterpreted tongues do not build up the church because they have no meaning for the church.
Tongues are only profitable if it contains some cognitive value (14:6).

3. Edification: The Important Principle (14:13-21).

The Corinthians placed a high value on seeking "spirits" and irrational ecstasy (14:12,14).
But Paul believes one must worship with mind and spirit (14:15).

Worship in the assembly must:

Praise God

Edify the Believer

Be Intelligible to the Visitor

4. Tongues, Prophecy and the Unbeliever (14:22-25).

Unbelievers valued tongues as a sign of God's ecstasy.
But Paul values prophecy more for unbelievers because it can convict them.
The presence of God is recognized through conviction rather than by ecstasy.

Discussion Questions (Leaders)

1. What does Paul's emphasis on the use of tongues indicate about what is going on during the assembly? What is the practical effect to the way tongues are used in the Corinthian assembly?
2. Given the Corinthian tendency towards spiritual pride, why are the commands in verse 1 important?
3. How does Paul contrast the gift of tongues and prophecy? What is the value and limit of tongues, and what is the value of prophecy?
4. In what way is their use of tongues another sign of their spiritual immaturity (v. 20)?
5. What would you say is Paul's fundamental point in this section? What is he most concerned about and why?
6. Which is more important? That members be comfortable or that outsiders be comfortable?
7. What are the limits of accommodating our assembly activities so that outsiders might be able to say "Amen" (be edified)?
8. How do we balance "spiritedness" and "intelligibility" in our worship assemblies?
9. What are the dangers of an overemphasis on "spiritedness"?
10. What are the dangers of an overemphasis on "intelligibility"?

**LESSON 14 - ORDER RATHER THAN CHAOS
IN THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY
1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

1. Paul does not condemn the sorts of things the Corinthians are doing as described in 14:26. He simply wants them to do it with the goal of edification. Note the list of things that are appropriate in the assembly. In particular, each one may have a hymn which probably refers to "solos" or someone sharing with the congregation a hymn they have written or a Psalm they have chosen to sing/chant before the church.
2. Paul is convinced that the goal of edification necessitates some "order" (14:40) in the assembly activities because God is the God of order (peace) rather than disorder (14:33).
3. Paul corrects three kinds of disorder in this text.
 - a. First, tongue speakers were speaking without interpreters and they were all speaking at once. Paul wants only two (and at the most three) to speak. If there is no interpreter, then the tongue speaker should be silent (14:28). Tongue speakers should control themselves.
 - b. Second, prophets should control themselves and speak in some kind of order. Two or three should speak while the other judge their prophecies. If any prophet receives a revelation, the others should be silent (14:30). Prophets should control themselves.
 - c. Third, women should maintain order as well by being silent. Just as in the case of the tongue speakers and the prophets, this is not total silence. Just as the tongue speakers could still sing, pray, etc., so could the women. Silence is enjoined in a specific situation which is alluded to in verse 35. Women should not act in an insubmissive (disruptive) manner. See section below for more on the gender problem here. Women should control themselves.
4. Paul addresses three specific examples of "disorder" that were present in the Corinthian assembly. He corrects each disorder. But these corrections were for the Corinthians and were not intended to be universal and normative. For example, were all churches limited to only two or three tongue speakers or two or three prophets? In the same way, not all churches were limited by Paul's instruction to the women here. Rather, Paul is applying the principle of order. Order means that the disorder of the Corinthians must be corrected. God is the God of order in all the assemblies of the church (14:33, and 33b belongs with verse 33a rather than with 34). Part of the "order" is that women act consistently with the "law" (Old Testament), that is, women act in a submissive manner. Order means that women do not violate God's intention for male "headship" which Paul has already discussed in 11:3-10. The Corinthian women were violating that "order" and thus Paul wants them to stop speaking in disruptive or insubmissive ways.
5. God demands order in all his assemblies because he wants his assemblies to serve the goal of edification. Order is necessary for edification. The Corinthian assemblies had sunk into disorder and this is what Paul corrects.
6. Paul is clear that order is a divine intention. The Corinthians are not the standard (14:36--the word of God did not originate with them, nor are they the only one's who have received the word). Rather, Paul's instruction is a standard--it is the commandment of God.
7. Paul's summary point in 14:39 points us to an emphasis on prophecy, but it does not forbid tongues. Tongues may be pursued, if interpreted, but prophecy is more valuable because it

edifies the body. Thus, everything must be done in a fitting and orderly way because this will provide the best occasion for edifying the body.

The Gender Text: 14:34-35

1. Interpretative Options: What does this text mean?
 - a. The text does not apply today because it deals with miraculous gifts that are now unavailable, but this fails to recognize that Paul is applying a principle based in the law. The principle has a broader application than this situation.
 - b. Commands women to be totally silent in the assembly (e.g., no singing, no confessing, no praying, etc.), but this does not recognize the specific situation of this text and it contradicts 11:3-6.
 - c. Prohibits women from leading the assembly in any kind of public speaking (e.g., they may sing but not lead singing), but this also fails to recognize the specific situation of this text and it contradicts 11:3-6 where women prayed and prophesied in the assembly. Does Paul forbid in 14:34 what he permitted (even regulated--stating the clothing they should wear for the sake of honoring their "heads") in 11:3-6?
 - d. Prohibits women from either (or all of the below):
 - (1) asking their husbands questions during their prophesying, or
 - (2) disrupting the judging of the prophets by asking questions, or
 - (3) disrupting the assembly by insubmissive behavior.

2. Observations

- a. Deals with disorder in the worship assembly of the Corinthian church (14:26-40).
- b. Commands silence in specific situations for tongue-speaker, prophets and women.
- c. The law says women should be submissive which means that they should be silent in that specific situation--the nature of the silence is demanded by the principle of submission. The situation demands silence because speaking in the way they were was an act of insubmission. The law does not command silence. Rather, it commands submission. Silence is an application of the principle of submission in this specific situation.
- d. The advice to ask husbands at home indicates the nature of the silence commanded--it prohibits disruptive speaking, not speaking in general. Verse 35 defines the nature of the silence prescribed in verse 34, that is, a questioning, judging or disruption of the assembly.
- e. Most probably, Paul is prohibiting women from either (or all of the below):
 - (1) asking their husbands questions during their prophesying, or
 - (2) disrupting the judging of the prophets by asking questions, or
 - (3) disrupting the assembly by insubmissive behavior.

Questions for Group Leaders

1. What are the range of activities that are part of the Corinthian worship assembly? Does this include solos (as in 14:26--each one have a hymn, where the word "hymn" is the noun of the verb "sing" in 14:15)? [Activities include: multiple speakers, questioning/judging of

speakers, teaching, tongue/interpretation, singing, prophesying/revelations.] What does this say about the "range" of activities in our assemblies?

2. What is the overriding principle(s) of this text? What principles must guide the conduct of any worship assembly? [Such as: edification, order]
3. Why are tongue-speakers told to be silent? [because there is no interpreter] Why should they be silent when there is no interpreter? [because the church would not be edified]
4. Why are prophets told to be silent? [because another receives a revelation] Why should they be silent when another receives a revelation? [because the church would be edified by that revelation]
5. Why are women told to be silent? [because it is a shame for them to speak in the assembly] Why is it a shame for them to speak in the assembly? [because it dishonors their husbands when they disrupt the assembly]
6. What does "silence" mean here? Does it mean that a woman cannot sing? That she cannot confess Christ? That she cannot make announcements? That she cannot offer a prayer request or a testimony about what God has done in her life? Should not "silence" be defined so that it does not contradict 11:3-6 but it fits the instruction for women to "ask their husbands" at home?
7. How do we square 1 Corinthians 11:3-6 (where women are permitted to pray and prophesy in the assembly) with 14:34-35 (where they are told to be silent)?
8. Why is order so important for Paul? What does he mean by "order"? Does he mean an "order of worship" so that everything that happens in the assembly is predefined? Can nothing be spontaneous?
9. How do we balance "spontaneity" in worship and "planning" in our worship?

Lesson 15 - The Gospel: Our Foundation and Hope

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

1. This ought to be a familiar text to us. It is one of those clear, unequivocal statements of the central aspects of the gospel.
2. Notice foundational character of this gospel in the first few verses. These simple statements reflect the crucial character of this summary of the gospel. It is the "word" we must hold on to firmly. This is the core of our faith.
 - a. Paul preached it.
 - b. They believed it.
 - c. They stand on it (consequently, "foundation")
 - d. They are saved by it.
 - e. It is of "first importance".
 - f. It is the tradition Paul handed down to them and they received.
3. The summary is fourfold:
 - a. Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture.
 - b. He was buried.
 - c. He was raised on the third day according to the Scripture.
 - d. He appeared to
 - (1) Peter
 - (2) Twelve (probably a "technical term" for "apostles" since all 12 were not there; Thomas was absent). In other words, he appeared to the "apostles" (but not all were there). This is the difference between "twelve" (#2) and "all the apostles" (in #5).
 - (3) 500 brothers, some of whom are still alive. Paul is saying, "if you don't believe, ask some of them."
 - (4) James (the brother of Jesus who became an elder in the Jerusalem church, already well-known in the church, even to the Corinthians).
 - (5) All the apostles
 - (6) Paul (the only first-hand, eye-witness testimony in the list). The question is whether Paul is
 - (a) Lying
 - (b) Hallucinating
 - (c) Telling the Truth.
4. Verses 9-11 are Paul's personal testimony. He reflects on his past sinfulness (persecuted the church) and recognizes that this is only by grace. This grace, however, did not make Paul lazy or apathetic. On the contrary, he worked harder...or better, the grace of God worked harder through him. The gospel is a message of grace, and this is what we believe and bear witness to.
5. If the dead are not raised, then Christ is not raised. If Christ is not raised, then there is no good news (gospel). If there is no good news, then we Christians are pitiful people. The resurrection is the hope of the gospel because the resurrection of Jesus destroyed death. Death is our enemy. Death destroys everything. Death comes to all. The good news is that God has conquered death in Jesus Christ. This is the witness we can offer people.

Group Discussion

1. What is the importance of the gospel to Christian faith and practice? How does Paul's wording in verses 1-2 illuminate that importance?
2. What does it mean to say that "Christ died for our sins"? How would you explain to someone who knew little about Christianity what that means?
3. What is the significance of the resurrection of Christ? How would you explain to someone who knew little about Christianity what it means?
4. What is the "apologetic" (defense of the faith; proving the resurrection) value of Paul's list of witnesses? Why mention that some of the 500 are still alive? Who provides the first-hand eyewitness testimony of this text?
5. In the light of Paul's statement in verses 9-11, what do we mean when we say, "there but for the grace of God, go I."
6. Why does Paul emphasize the resurrection in this section?
7. Why does salvation depend on the resurrection of Jesus?
8. How can you use verse 18 in talking with someone about the uniqueness of Jesus? Many believe in God, but we must call them to believe in the work of God in Jesus. His resurrection is the uniqueness of that work--he conquered death. How can we use this effectively in witnessing to other people?

Lesson 16 - The Collection: Our Obligation

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

1. This historical setting of this text is fairly clear. On his third missionary journey Paul is taking up a collection of money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul refers this collection as a "fellowship" that was made for the "poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26). Luke refers to this collection and notes the different individuals who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem as representatives of the churches which had contributed (Acts 20:4). In his second letter to Corinth, Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete their commitment to this fund (2 Cor. 8:10-11). 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 provide the theological motivation for this gift and some of the principles that should guide the Corinthians in their giving: (1) goal of equity among brothers (8:13-15); (2) give according to what one has (8:12); (3) gift should arise out of the heart (9:7-8); and (4) the motive for giving is to bring glory to God (9:12-15).
2. There are some difficulties that are associated with this text.
 - a. We are not sure whether the collection was set aside individually at home (saved up at home and collected when Paul arrived) or whether it was set aside corporately during the weekly assembly (saved up in a "treasury" so that there would be no collections when Paul came). I think the later is more likely since the "first day of the week" makes more sense in the context of a corporate assembly or a weekly day of worship rather than, as some have argued, that "first day of the week" was payday in the ancient world.
 - b. There is some disagreement about whether this text is a "pattern" of some kind and what kind of pattern it is. Some would say that this text commands all congregations to have a weekly monetary contribution. But the Macedonians were not commanded to do this (2 Cor. 8:1-4), and ultimately Paul does not even command the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:8). Further, if it were necessary for the "pattern" of the church to have a weekly contribution, then this is something the Corinthians would have already been doing and there would have been no need for Paul to "command" anything, and there would have been no need for the Corinthians to ask about how to go about collecting this money. ("Now about..." indicates the Corinthians were asking advice about how to do this.) Further, Paul does not "command" in the sense of laying down a law, but he suggests an arrangement for fulfilling the goal.
 - c. There is also some disagreement about whether this text is a "pattern" about to whom the church should give money among the poor. Some believe that only "poor saints" should receive money from the church treasury. However, I think 2 Corinthians 8:13 indicates that this money not only supplied the needs of saints, but also helped non-Christians. Further, the examples of 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 reflect how God's people (everyone, even the aliens, were permitted to collect manna; cf. 2 Cor. 8:15 as a quotation of Exodus 16:18) and God himself gives to non-saints (God supplies the seed to unbelievers too). In addition, God's provisions in creation and providence reflect his benevolence to all people, saint and non-saint.
 - d. There is also some disagreement about whether this text is a "pattern" for how the good works of the church should be supported. Some believe that this text excludes any other means of fund-raising than free-will offerings or that the church should not receive money in any other way than free-will offerings. However, the text itself does not exclude anything. It only calls upon the Corinthians to share according to their ability.

Can a church treasury earn interest on its money? If this text is exclusive, it excludes even that.

3. The basic problem, I think, is reading this text as a "pattern." Instead of an absolute pattern for the church, it is rather an occasional, incidental arrangement for the specific purpose of helping the poor saints in Jerusalem. It does not intend to say this is the only way you can do things or that this is the only reason for which you can take up a collection. It is Paul's specific response to a Corinthian question. Question: How should we collect this money for Jerusalem? Response: Follow the arrangement I gave the churches of Galatia, take up a collection when you meet on Sunday and save it up till I come.
4. What are some of the principles of this text if it is not simply a pure command obligating us to a particular every Sunday duty?
 - a. It reflects the principle that God's people ought to meet the needs of specific situations, and they can use the convenience of the Sunday assembly to meet these needs.
 - b. It reflects the principle that everyone should give "in keeping" with their "income." God calls people to share according to what they have, not according to what they don't have.
 - c. It reflects the principle that God's people should have a special concern for the poor. Indeed, the apostles charged Paul that in his preaching of the gospel he should remember the poor (Gal. 2:10), which Paul was eager to do.
5. Paul wants representatives to accompany the gift to Jerusalem. I don't think this is to insure how the money is used, but to increase the dimension of "fellowship" that the gift represents. Paul intended this gift to be a "fellowship" between Jews and Gentiles. Thus, some Gentile representatives would enable a personal dimension of fellowship. [All the names in Acts 20:4 are Greek names, though we cannot be certain that they were all Gentiles. Indeed, Timothy was half-Gentile, but technically Jewish.]

Group Discussion

1. How have you heard this text read in the past? What conclusions have you heard drawn from this text? Evaluate those conclusions.
2. What is the historical situation of this text? How do you understand the fact that the Galatians were told to do something that the Macedonians were not (2 Cor. 8:1-4)? How do you understand the fact that the Corinthians were ultimately not commanded to do this (2 Cor. 8:8)?
3. Is this text an absolute command for every Christian to give every first day of the week in the weekly assembly as a test of faithfulness? Why? Why not?
4. What principles do you see in this text that apply to contemporary Christians?
5. How would you explain to a friend Paul's principle about how much to give in verse 2? [You might read 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 and 9:6-8 at this point as well.]
6. What is significant about who will have the responsibility and accountability over this gift?
7. Given our discussion above, what is the "obligation" of this text?